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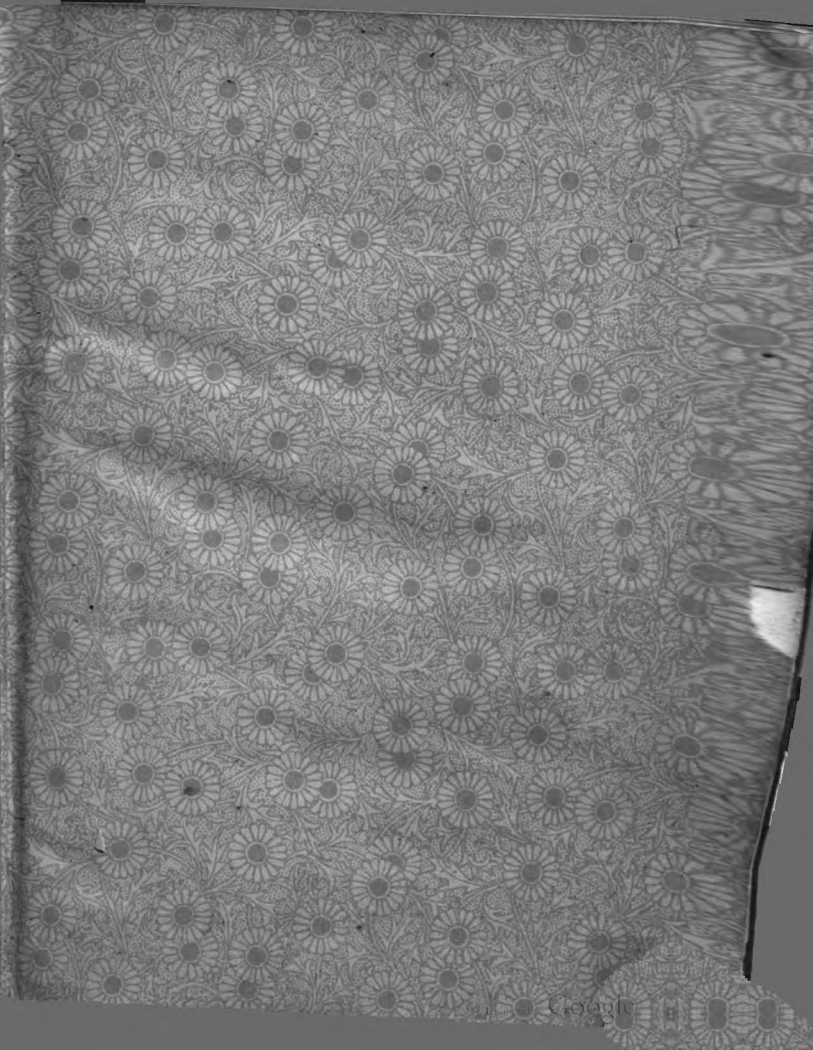
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Self-Consecration
or
The Gift of One's Self to God.

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SELF-CONSECRATION

OR

THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD

FROM THE FRENCH OF THE

ABBÉ GROU

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE

REV. CHARLES C. GRAFTON

"Grant Thee Thy Heart's desire and fulfil all Thy mind."

PSALM xx. 4

SECOND EDITION

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To
THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY NATIVITY,
WHO,
CONSECRATED TO THE LOVE AND THE SACRIFICE OF
BETHLEHEM,
WOULD MAKE IT THEIR LIFE'S WORK TO WIN SOULS TO THAT
SELF-DEVOTION WHICH IS THE HEART'S DESIRE
OF OUR INCARNATE LORD;
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED BY
THE TRANSLATOR

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INTRODUCTION.

THE author of the following little treatise needs no introduction to Churchmen. His name is a familiar one, and though belonging to another communion, yet the aspirations, begotten by partaking the same sacramental gifts of grace, show that by our union to the Incarnate Lord our devotional life is the same.

Living as we are in times when the Grace of God is stirring many hearts to face the problem of life and ask themselves—what can I do for God?—the words of this book may come to some like a loving response from the Heavenly Father.

Earnest and deep souls will not be content with the superficial answers the

philosophy of self-culture, with its doubtful future, can give ; or with a Christianity which makes Christ divine, yet our union with Him only one of faith and not sacramental incorporation into the God-man ; or with such a Christianity as would offer a future happiness which must be forever insecure, because it does not grasp the fact that the Incarnation is the completion of creation, and man can only be a partaker of eternal life and holiness, and therefore happiness, through union with It.

If we look deeply into the matter of self-consecration, which is the subject of Grou's work, we shall see that

Self-consecration has a connection with the mystery of creation.

By the act of creation God calls into being that which before had only existence. The material universe ever existed in the Divine thought, but by a Divine act was elevated into being. The

blessed evolution followed the progressive order of the Eternal wisdom and was consummated in man. Man, God willed, should not be like other products of creation, a mere silent embodiment of His Eternal thought, but should pulsate with the energy of a divinely-given life and be possessed of a creative power. This creative power lies in his own self-determining will. He exercises his prerogative in its highest capacity when he gives himself back to God. This is what is meant by Self-consecration.

There is something ennobling in the thought that *man can make, as it were in kind, a response to God and can echo back His creative act.*

God has called me into being, and I am not a powerless atom, a sport of elements. It is not the achievements of earth which limit me ; great as they may be, they are nothing to this : I can give myself back to God. The arms of God

are opened toward us. Like the bosom of the Greek matron displayed to her infant, sporting unconscious of its danger on the brink of a precipice, the Being of God invites us back to Himself. Give thyself to Him. So will the creative act become complete and being shall pass on into the Eternal Life and the Life of the Eternal shall pass into it, and the good and the beautiful will become permanent.

In this offering of itself by the creature to God lies the law of its life.

The creature was made for God. From out of God the Angels came, and by loving obedience they flew back to Him. They passed from their natural state into the happiness secured by the union with God in the Beatific Glory: a union to be perfected through Him Who became Incarnate that He might join "all things in one, both which are in heaven and earth." With a longer opportunity of choice given him, man is confronted by

the same problem of destiny. He is made for God and cannot attain the satisfying end of his being, save by rising to a union with Him. God, with all His omnipotence, cannot make man happy without making him holy; and cannot secure him in holiness without uniting man supernaturally to Himself. Man may by his own wilful neglect miss this end, or he may by grace rise to the predestined perfection of his being, and the first act by which this is done is by giving one's self back to God.

By this act the soul begins to enter into its freedom.

The Angels who maintained their independence fell into slavery. Those who surrendered their freedom found themselves free in God. Independence, freedom, liberty, these are the world's watchwords. Ever to man the devils suggest their syren song of independence. Man hates to acknowledge that

he is a creature. He is impatient with his condition of dependence. He rebels at the duty his relation to his Maker involves. God made me. God owns me. I have no right to myself, to do as I please, to live as I please, to think as I please, to believe as I please. Yet, in the surrender to this law of the Creature's relation to the Creator, man finds his freedom. We are bound to God by a tie closer than that which binds the planet to the sun, and, out of right relation to God, man's being is disordered and he becomes a slave. His spiritual nature does not see God, the light in him becomes darkness, his reason becomes the slave of materialistic laws, and he can believe only what they will let him. Rightly related to God, man knows God and is free with the participation of the life of God. Law is no longer command enforced by authority, but the law of God is *his* law, because it is the

expression of his own life. He rises into God and is free with God's own freedom. He rejoices in God because God is, and he knows that all God has is his too. "All I have is God's. I have no separate purse from Him, and all He has is mine." The heart is one with God's Heart, the will one with His, and "what, dear God, pleaseth Thee, pleaseth me," and I find my joy in the joy of my Lord. Well may the soul cry out : "Dear and Blessed Father and my God, I had rather be Thy slave than have all the universe without Thee. For Thee my soul is homesick. It longs and pants for Thy courts—and I give myself back to Thee."

This law of the creature's life is one which is to endure forever.

God does not, either in the kingdom of grace or of glory, cease to give Himself to the creature. God is good, and the law of goodness is, "as it gives, so it lives." He will ever go on giving, yet never come

to the end of His goodness and bounty, because it is infinite. It belongs to Him ever to have the best of the theandric work, and He must ever have the best of the "more blessed to give than to receive." So upon the Angels and the glorified is He ever pouring forth of the riches of His Being, while yet the more they receive, the more they give back to Him, and in that jubilation of reciprocal gift continually live. What is thus the worship of the heavenly state we begin here, by giving ourselves back to God.

This was the law of the life of Christ, the Son of Man.

In Him humanity rose to its full perfection. He was not only the first and chief of men; but the Head of the new creation, the new representative of humanity. In Him, as its High Priest, the creature's law of life found perfect expression. He gave His human nature back to God from the first moment of

its existence. Had the nature into which He entered not been a sin-stained and fallen one, we may yet believe He would have become Incarnate ; but then the outward manner of His offering of Himself to God would have been different. Though He was not indebted to sin for the opportunity of His Incarnation, yet the wrong done by the nature with which He identified Himself made the offering one of reparation. Love, seeking to repair the wrong done to God's dear Heart by sin, could content itself with no other expression than dying for Him. Love, seeking to restore the human nature which had brought death upon itself by sin, could not content itself till it had poured out its very life-blood, that by it the dead might live. So the Cross became the way by which Christ gave Himself to God ; and the Cross, to us wayfarers, is what the Beatific Vision is to Saints in Heaven. It is the measure of

sin—the mirror of virtues—the Ladder reaching to Heaven—the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden—the pulpit of the Great Teacher—the Throne upon which Christ “reigns from the Tree”—the Altar of the Divine Sacrifice—the source of all grace—the Fountain of mercy ; but pre-eminently, it is on the Cross that Love, the Love which is Eternal and is God, is made visible.

And in the Cross we find not merely another motive for giving ourselves back to God ; not merely the motive, powerful and constraining as it is, that He loved me and has redeemed me and saved me, but

The soul finds in the Cross its highest privilege.

It too can suffer. Angels cannot suffer. Saints in glory cannot suffer. Suffering is love's highest expression, and this, while yet we linger here on earth, is possible for us. We too can love God,

we can answer back God's own love in kind. We can speak to Him in the language He has invented for love's expression. We can by sacrificing now the things of earth—its honors, pleasures, wealth, comforts—rise up to God's own action and give back love for love. Oh! what Christ wants is not the wealth or the influence of the world, but warm, loving hearts, content to answer back to Him with nothing less than His own self-sacrificing expression of love. What the Church wants is some hearts who shall "count all things but loss" for Him, and be madly in love with Christ, to use the language of a Saint who so reproached himself: "Lord, I am not so madly in love with Thee as Thou art with me."

Oh! the folly of working for self and this present world! Oh! the misery of holding back from God's loving call, or of taking up religion as a means of somehow getting into a place called heaven!

The future which the Incarnation and the Church and its Sacraments open to us is vastly different. It is an entrance into the Life of God, secured by a supernatural union with Him in Christ. And oh ! the blessedness, in the eternal state of bliss as we gaze on the glory of our Incarnate Lord, if, on looking back on the life of earth, we can feel that when we could, when there was the opportunity, we did something for Him which cost us something in the doing ; for then we shall see all the efforts and sacrifices, done by His grace for love of Him, by Him accepted and cherished, and even made parts of the Robe of His Beauty or inwrought among the jewels of His Crown.

CHARLES C. GRAFTON.

BOSTON, 1885.

SELF - CONSECRATION ;

OR,

THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD.

It is the loving desire of God that, as soon as a Christian soul has the use of his reason, he should, ratifying the offering made in Baptism, consecrate himself to his God with all his heart. Few Christians, when able to know themselves and to begin to reflect, make this entire sacrifice of themselves to God. The greater number even of those who profess piety remain ignorant all their lives of what it is to give themselves to God. When they hear of it, and this offering, so necessary for the Christian soul, is proposed to them, they disapprove, and cannot re-

solve to make this great sacrifice, which includes every other. They make for themselves a plan of devotion, not according to God's idea, but according to their own idea; in which they are willing to submit partially to the leadings of grace, but not to be governed by it solely in all things. In everything not absolutely commanded, or in things disagreeable of performance, they believe in their right to choose for themselves, and that God does not intend so to restrain us that we should depend on His guidance for each detail of our conduct.

If there are few who attempt this entire gift of themselves to God, there are still fewer who persevere and really accomplish it. Even after once offering the sacrifice, it is not long before they take it back and govern themselves more or less as self-will and self-love prompt them. It costs nature too much to rest continually under God's Guiding Hand.

The yoke is loosened little by little, to-day in one way, to-morrow in another, and sometimes it is altogether shaken off. This is the reason why so many souls are lost and why so many others only reach Heaven through long and terrible sufferings, and why the number of the saints is so small. I mean by saints, those who, at whatever age they may be, whether they have always preserved their baptismal innocence or have lost it, or even have lived some time in sin, have at last completely and seriously given themselves to God, and have so fulfilled the design of perfection which He had for them as much as lies in their power.

Of all matters of Christian life, this is without exception the most important ; it is the foundation of the whole structure ; the beginning, and in fact the only path for a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

We cannot then examine a matter too thoroughly which, if well understood,

will teach us everything else. Let us ask God to enlighten us about it Himself, and let us read the following reflections with docile hearts.

I.

WHAT IS IT TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD ?

To give one's self to God is so to consecrate to Him every thought, every affection, every action, that the mind may be occupied with Him only and with the objects which He at each moment presents to the mind ; that the heart may love Him only, and creatures in their relation to Him according to the order which He has Himself established ; that everything we do and everything we suffer may be for Him, and that His glory and His good pleasure be our final aim and our first intention.

To give one's self to God is to renounce all self-guidance, and to be guided in everything by grace ; to no longer follow self-will in anything whatsoever, but to

will only what God wills ; to give back to Him our free-will that He may dispose of it as it shall please Him best.

The Christian who has given himself to God is no longer his own ; he has no longer any right over himself ; he leaves himself in God's Hands and submits to the superiors God has placed over him ; he does not permit himself any desire, form the smallest plan, nor take any step of his own motion. In a word, he has passed into God's domain, his eyes are always fixed on Him to learn His will, ever holding himself ready to execute it without argument or offering any excuse, and without permitting his own inclination or repugnance to stand in the way.

At first sight so great a surrender of self is very alarming, as it would seem to place the soul in unbearable restraint. Let us examine together how God can make His yoke easy to bear, and how love of Him will render it even a delight.

II.

REASONS FOR GIVING ONE'S SELF THUS TO GOD.

NOTHING IS MORE JUST.

LET us first begin by examining the reasons which make it our duty to give ourselves to God, without being deterred by foolish imaginations which have been overthrown by experience. These reasons are numberless ; to speak of them all would require too much time, and we will confine ourselves to the principal ones.

Is it not just beyond a question, that we should give ourselves entirely to Him who has brought us out of nothing, and who is ever preserving the life He has given ; to Him, who is our first princi-

ple and our last end, our Supreme Blessedness, from whom we hope for everything, and without whom there is no possibility of happiness? Yet what need has God of us? None. Whether we exist or not, whether we give ourselves to Him or not, does not make Him more or less happy. Why then does He require such entire self-surrender? It is because the law of our nature makes it our only true position; because it is the order of Creation; because God has given us no authority to be our own master, nor to give ourselves to any other than Himself. If we claim any right of disposing of ourselves as it shall please us best, we are usurpers; we rob God of a possession which belongs to Him. If we give ourselves to any one else, it could only be to a creature to whom we really cannot give ourselves, and who cannot receive us without doing a great wrong, without the greatest outrage that

can be offered to God, even preferring something before Him.

But if it is just that we should belong to God, it is also just that we should be His in all and for ever : in no thing and at no time may we withdraw ourselves from His domain. His right over us extends over all that we are, in whatever state or circumstances we may be placed. He has created us and could only create us for Himself. We misuse the mind, if we employ it for any other end than to know Him ; we misuse the heart, if we do not employ it in loving Him with all its capacity of affection ; we misuse the freedom of the will, if we avail ourselves of it in any other way than to resolve to please Him in all things ; we misuse all the faculties both of soul and body, if they are not used in conformity with His purposes. Is more left to our disposal than to the angels and the blessed ones in heaven ? Does not our Lord Jesus Christ

teach us to say to our Heavenly Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Is there one instant, one occasion when the will of God is not done in heaven? Then we are to aim at accomplishing it just so fully and just so constantly on earth. The only difference between the blessed ones and ourselves is that they cannot separate themselves from the will of God, because their state immovably attracts them to it, and we below always have the unhappy power of going astray. But still it is a duty as indispensable for us as for them, to have no other rule of life than the Divine Will.

Thus, when we consider what God is in Himself and what He is in His relation to us, whether we consult reason or conscience, religious feeling or faith, all conspire to enforce the law that we should give ourselves entirely to God, and to God only; all unite in teaching us that this is our first and most important duty.

III.

SECOND REASON.

HAPPINESS IS ONLY FOUND IN THE GIFT
OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD.

As God is in Himself our Supreme Blessedness, therefore can there be no happiness for us, either in this life or the life to come, except by union with Him. But here on earth, where we know Him only by faith, what other union with God can we have than by so giving ourselves to Him now, that we may be His for ever ; devoting to Him both heart and soul, so that our desires and affections may be one with His, for it is in this conformity of desire and affection that a union of spirit consists ? He has given us power of discernment and free-

will, so that, recognizing what He is and what our relations to Him are, we may fix our hearts on Him alone, by an intelligent choice. He has ordained that this freedom of choice shall be both for His glory and our reward ; that is to say, we glorify Him here by a love which intelligently prefers Him above all else, and beginning even in this life to be happy in this love, we are rewarded by glorifying Him forever in heaven, and finding there the consummation of happiness in the consummation of love.

He has said in Holy Scripture, " My son, give Me thy heart." * All that He desires of us is reduced to this gift, which in reality comprehends all ; the only gift of which He is jealous and without which any offering from us would be nothing to Him. As if He said : " Give Me this heart which I have made for Myself,

* Prov. xxiii. 25.

which I alone can satisfy, which in its deepest recesses longs for Me alone, and which without Me cannot find peace and happiness. It belongs to Me and to Me alone ; and it is truly great and noble in that any other being than Myself is too small for its desires." God does not ask this of us for His own advantage ; it is for ours. He has no need of us ; but we cannot do without Him. He is entirely happy in Himself ; but we can never be happy without Him.

Is there happiness to be found in self ? We find there only poverty and need ; and that should be no surprise, since we are creatures drawn out of nothing. Can other creatures or the wealth of the universe give happiness ? No. They, like ourselves, have come out of nothing and are in themselves as poor and dependent. We might possess them all and forever, and yet the heart would be none the less empty, famished, longing for the real ful-

ness, the supreme blessedness, which is none other than God. Until the heart is entirely God's, there is no repose, there is something beyond which it always longs for or regrets. But when it possesses God, it is content, joyous, and at peace ; no longer subject to that restless longing which gnaws, devours, consumes the heart that has not sought its true happiness in God. But the human heart can only possess God in so much as God takes possession of it ; and God will give Himself in proportion to the entirety of the heart's gift of itself to Him. All for all.

IV.

THIRD REASON.

THE PRESENT MOMENT IS ALL THAT WE HAVE
AT OUR OWN DISPOSAL.

ONE can never say : "I can give myself to God when I please ; there is no hurry, I have plenty of time to think about it." Such an argument is as false as it is senseless. It is false, since we have only the time of this present life, so short, so uncertain, in which to give ourselves to God. We cannot dispose of a month, a day, or an hour. If we do not resolve at this moment, we may not be able to do so in the following moment. We may not live so long. At this instant grace is strongly urging ; rejected now, may it not reject us ? Is it so much at our dis-

posal that we can use it when we please ? Will it be easier to do this thing to-morrow than to-day ? If it is deferred, perhaps it may never be done. Besides, it is senseless to put off from day to day entering the only way which leads to happiness,—not to do at once that which God is urging upon us, and which we shall regret not having done sooner. Why should we compel ourselves to say with St. Augustine : “ Too late I have begun to love Thee, O Beauty ever ancient ; O Beauty ever new, I have begun too late to love Thee ” ? Alas ! we must already thus reproach ourselves in giving ourselves even now to Thee, O God ! Why then aggravate it by new delays, and make the remembrance more bitter ? How painful this reproach is to a heart wounded by Divine Love ! If His mercy grants us this blessed pain, let us at once yield all, and receive with loving gratitude this most sweet of all wounds. Truly

we do not know how great harm we are doing ourselves, in putting off the complete and generous gift of ourselves to God.

V.

FOURTH REASON.

THE GIFT OF OURSELVES TO GOD IS OUR
ONLY WAY OF GLORIFYING HIM.

GOD has created us for His glory ; it is the first aim of creation, and it should be our first aim in His service. But how can we be a means to His glory, except by yielding ourselves entirely to Him ? That which glorifies Him in our actions cannot be what we invent for ourselves, though intended for His honor, but what He wills to do in us and through us. He only asks of us an absolute devotion to Himself, a disposition of readiness to obey without limit, which, refusing Him nothing, and resisting Him in nothing, will let Him exercise His authority over us according to His good pleasure. He is glorified by us as much

as He desires, when He is ever holding us in His hand, and finds us wholly submissive to His will. Whether we do great things or whether they are but small, it is quite indifferent to Him, provided we do what He wishes. His will alone gives a value to the action, and by that rule alone is it measured by Him. The act of giving ourselves without reserve to Him, is properly the only one which gives Him glory ; all other acts are but the consequence of this one, and are valuable only as its consequence. If we were ever so little jealous for the glory of God, should we hesitate a moment to procure it for Him by this entire gift of ourselves ?

Moreover, God has special designs for each soul : He has designed this one to glorify Him in one way, and that one in another. The choice of the way is not ours ; the only point which concerns us is to respond perfectly to what is laid out

for us. We do not know His designs for us ; but we do know that they will never be fulfilled if we are not entirely given to Him. He waits for this gift of ourselves before showing them to us ; because, if He let us know them beforehand, we might not consent to them, or if we did consent we might not have the courage to carry them out. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not let St. Paul know the great expectations He had in view for him until, submissive and ready for everything, he had said to Him : " Lord, what would'st Thou have me to do ? " If we read the lives of the Saints attentively we shall see how He only explains what He desires of them after they have yielded themselves entirely to His control. What a misfortune for us if, because of our failure to place ourselves in His hands, we should live and die without having accomplished, or even known, God's will for us !

VI.

FIFTH REASON.

BY THIS WAY ALONE CAN WE BECOME
HOLY.

To miss our vocation would bring us an added misfortune, since our sanctification entirely depends on the glory God gains through us. We are saints, when we give to God all the glory He expects from us. We cannot attain saintliness, perhaps our salvation itself is in danger, if we do not place ourselves in a condition to glorify Him as He desires, by yielding all to Him. Perhaps there is no middle course for some of us between being great saints or reprobates. But even were it not so, and we did not risk our salvation, should we not greatly in-

jure ourselves, if we did not seek all the perfection to which we are called, and which we can never reach but by the entire gift of ourselves to God ?

If we have faith, there should be to us no object so desirable as that holiness, in itself the principle of all present and future happiness. Now, by the gift of ourselves to God, and so only, we enter the way of holiness, and what disposition can so conduce to our sanctification as that of placing ourselves entirely in God's Hands, in order that He Himself may make us holy ? God is no less the only Giver of holiness, than the only All-Holy One ; and all sanctification of the creature is God's work. It is He who begins it, carries it on, and finishes it. All that He asks of us is to surrender ourselves to His leading, putting no obstacle in the way of His work, but seconding it by co-operation. He will work with so much the more success, if we

have made Him the absolute Master of our wills ; for it is in the will that this work is chiefly done. What is it we do when we give ourselves to God ? We give in advance a general consent to everything that He shall judge necessary for our perfection, and while this consent exists, it clearly extends to every particular operation of His grace within us. As long as we do not retract this consent, God acts freely and without interruption, whether in correcting our faults, or enabling us to practise virtues, or purifying our intentions : each day the empire of grace over nature is extended ; the old man is destroyed ; the new man is built up ; the work advances and attains at length the perfection God wishes to give it. Who can hinder Him in His work if we ourselves do not resist Him ? What more efficacious means of preventing such resistance can we use than an entire surrender of ourselves to Him ?

We have still the power to retract our consent, it is true ; but God, seeing our purity of intention and generosity, will guard us against ourselves, drawing us on to lean more and more upon Him, to give Him our entire confidence, and so lovingly does He captivate the will, that it fears nothing so much as to regain its liberty and escape from the guidance of God.

VII.

GOD'S COMMAND OF ENTIRE LOVE OF HIMSELF CAN ONLY BE FULFILLED THROUGH THIS GIFT.

WE are commanded to love God with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength. It is the first and greatest commandment. But how can we thus love Him if all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength is not consecrated to His love? And in what other way can we consecrate them than by the entire gift of ourselves? Let us weigh this reason well; it is clear and decisive. Otherwise the thing is impossible.

The command to love God involves two things: first, to avoid each thing, great or small, that may offend Him,

never willingly to permit anything that may in the least displease Him, and to keep ourselves on guard as much as possible against the trifling faults coming from a first impulse or surprise; secondly, to practise, according to our condition and circumstances, every virtue that God desires of us and in all the perfection He desires, to oblige ourselves to please Him in all things, without regard to the cost of the sacrifice it may involve. This precept, considered as it should be, in all its extent, in what it forbids and in what it commands, evidently comprehends the avoidance of all evil and the pursuit of all good. But is it possible to keep a sincere and constant determination to flee all that is evil and to pursue all that is good, unless we are fully and irrevocably given to God?

The Christian ought to allow himself to do nothing which can lessen his love in the least degree, and, on the other

hand, he ought to leave nothing undone which might increase it. He is more or less guilty, if he is the cause of any hindrance to God's love for him ; he is still more guilty, if, through negligence, or cowardice, or indifference, he does not contribute his utmost to the increase of so precious a friendship. There is no doubt about this, but can he ever accomplish these two duties, or put himself in such a condition that he may fulfil them, otherwise than by an entire and unre-served gift of himself to God ?

God, Who alone can place within us His holy love, and Who alone can give it increase, surely is ready to give us every grace necessary for the preservation and growth of this treasure of love ; but this grace, without which we can do nothing, He only gives in proportion as we give ourselves to Him. He begins ; but we must respond, otherwise He will not continue ; and if we make reserva-

tions for self in our dealings with Him, we force Him, so to speak, to withdraw just so much the effects of His goodness toward us. When by His Holy Spirit He has spread abroad His love in our hearts, the first effect which He expects from us, is the gift of ourselves. He only shows us His love to provoke ours ; and the greater the marks of love that He shows to us, the more does he expect from us in return. Thus, it is evident that His grace increases only as we deserve it by our correspondence ; and this co-operation will never be entire, until the gift of ourselves has been so too.

The desire to place some bounds and reservations to our love of God is directly contrary to the nature of this love, which, since its Object is essentially infinite, can only be limited by the finite capacity of the loving heart. But this capacity always has the power of becoming greater ; it has no other limit than that which

God Himself fixes for it ; for ourselves, we cannot measure it. We ought to love God without measure, that is, with all the capacity of our heart, which is always susceptible of increase. But never can we love Him unboundedly, if we do not belong to Him without bounds ; nor with all the capacity of the heart, if that heart is not entirely His own.

If it were possible for us to love God infinitely as He Himself loves, we should be obliged so to love Him, for this would be the only love which would respond to His Infinite Perfection ; and we are only dispensed from it, because it is not in our power. We ought, then, to love Him as much as we can by the help of His grace, which is being continually offered us to love Him more and more. Thus, God's desire is that our love should continually increase by new developments, and that we should never feel satisfied with ourselves, thinking we love

Him enough, since at each moment He will give us power to love Him more. But what is it to love, if not to give one's self to the object loved? The property of love is to pour out all that it can give; it is imperfect so long as it keeps back anything; and the heart which is truly God's, can never be content if there is the least reservation with which it can reproach itself.

The more we try to fathom the subject of the love of God, the more we shall feel convinced that the obligation it imposes upon us can only be satisfied by the entire gift of ourselves. Until it is made, the heart can never feel easy; until then it cannot know what the habitual enjoyment of God is, nor experience the sweetness and perfect peace of His service. Let us examine ourselves upon this point, and our inmost soul will answer whether we are God's or not.

VIII.

THE EXAMPLE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
LAYS UPON US A LAW FOR THE GIFT OF
OURSELVES TO GOD.

WE are obliged as Christians to walk in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is to say, we are to imitate Him. Our salvation depends upon this imitation. The Gospel distinctly states this in many places, and St. Paul assures all the elect that they are fore-ordained to be conformed to the likeness of the Son of God. In truth the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us to become our Model.

But in what particular is He especially our Model? In His devotion to God, His Father. There must be the chief point of our likeness to Him; this is the first and greatest feature to which all

others are but relative. Now, the devotion of Jesus Christ was perfect ; it was so in the first moment of His life ; it was never retracted or diminished by the least reluctance ; and it was consummated in His last Breath on the cross. Everything that the Will of His Heavenly Father proposed to Him He accepted ; submitting Himself to all without exception, however severe it might be, and He accomplished all without omitting the least circumstance.

What was the life of Jesus Christ but a continual and uninterrupted execution of the oblation He made of Himself when He came into the world ?

And so, in proportion, ought the life of the Christian to be. As soon as he knows himself, and has learned that a Christian is simply a follower and imitator of Jesus Christ, like his Master he must offer himself to do the will of God, must make it his purpose to accomplish

it and never to wander from it, and he must be faithful in this purpose unto death. He should be persuaded in his inmost heart that all his steps are numbered, that all his way is marked out for him, that everything he has to do or suffer during the course of his life is arranged by Providence, and that he has nothing more to do than to walk exactly in this path under God's guidance. A Christian who is not devoted to God is no Christian at heart, whatever he may appear outwardly. A Christian who has placed some restriction on his devotion to God, as is so often the case, is an imperfect Christian, and but a feeble imitator of Jesus Christ our Lord. If this idea of the Christian life is not generally held, it is because men have not learned it from the original Model, our Saviour's example and teaching.

IX.

SELF-RENUNCIATION AS SET FORTH IN THE
GOSPEL, IS THE SAME THING AS THE
GIFT OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD.

JESUS CHRIST our Lord has said : "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." *

Such are the two conditions that He exacts from whomsoever would follow Him : self-renunciation, and bearing the cross. But these two conditions presuppose and include the gift of one's self to God, and in fact they are but the execution of that gift. Self-renunciation, in the sense that our Lord understands it, is so to place ourselves in the Hands of God that, sinful and imperfect

* St. Matt. xvi. 24.

as we are, He may make us holy and perfect ; to give up to Him all our faculties that He may purify them ; no longer to guide ourselves, that He, guiding us Himself, may raise us to a holiness worthy of Himself. The Christian renounces self only to be able to give himself to God. As soon as the renunciation is made, he is no longer his own, he is God's ; and the practice of renunciation only consists in fighting and destroying in self whatever hinders us from perfectly belonging to God. Therefore to undertake to follow our Saviour necessitates, first, a general act of renunciation, which answers to the gift of one's self ; and afterward must follow the particular renunciations which God requires of us, day after day, making us die to ourselves little by little, until we have no other life but His.

In the same way, to take up and bear our cross is to receive as from the Hand

of God each day all the troubles, contradictions, humiliations, in whatever way they come to us, whether from God, from men or from the devil ; not to complain, but to suffer them with resignation, patience and love. This cannot be done unless we recognize God's right to dispose of our persons and all that belongs to us as He pleases, and unless we are in that habitual state of devotion, which can say like Job : "The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away ; blessed be the Name of the Lord." Is it possible to think and speak in this manner, to preserve a submissive and peaceful heart in the midst of all kinds of afflictions, if the heart is not fully and sincerely given to God with a will never to retract the gift whatever the circumstances may be ? Is it not evident that our complaints, murmurs, resistance over our crosses, have their source in self-will, self-love, in a nature which in one word is unsancti-

fied, still living in and for itself? We must not then flatter ourselves that we are following Jesus Christ in the way of self-renunciation and the cross, if we have not begun by giving ourselves entirely to God.

X.

THE TITLE OF "CHILDREN OF GOD" IM-
POSES UPON US THE OBLIGATION OF
GIVING OURSELVES TO HIM.

WE are, as Christians, the children of God ; we receive at our baptism this grace of divine adoption, an adoption giving a character which is ineffaceable ; and we take upon us then a sacred engagement to live as God's children. This character will turn to our condemnation if we are untrue to it. Now, St. Paul declares, that they that "are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."* The others have the title ; but they do not fulfil their obligations if the Spirit of God is not their Leader.

* Romans, viii. 14.

The Spirit of God is a Spirit of love, a Spirit of grace, a supernatural Spirit which raises us above ourselves, and changes our nature, bringing us into conformity to God in all our thoughts, affections, and actions. This Spirit of God is as gentle as He is powerful, and never forces us ; He only leads us just so much as we consent to be led by Him. Therefore, in order that the Spirit of God may guide us in all our ways, interior as well as exterior, we must be given to God, yielding Him all power over our wills, and leaving Him to dispose of us according to His good pleasure. If we still control ourselves, if we claim the right of governing our own movements in anything whatever, if we offer the least resistance to the Spirit of God, it will not be true that He is our Leader in everything, and we shall not be acting as the children of God in those things where His action does not direct ours.

This is manifestly a consequence of the teaching of the Apostle.

Again, we may notice, and this observation is most important, that as, being men and reasonable creatures, we must obey the dictates of our reason in everything, and never allow ourselves to do anything it does not approve; even so, being Christians, must we obey the leading of the Spirit of God in everything, and never swerve from it. Any internal characteristic, any exterior action which the Spirit of God does not recognize as His own, is to be condemned in a Christian, or at least deserves no praise, and is quite useless for salvation. In the lives of most Christians, considered by this incontestable rule, how many hours are wasted, how little work done for God! And whence comes this failure, this immense loss of precious moments? Because they have not so given themselves to God, as to be in all things governed by His Spirit.

XI.

THIS GIFT OF SELF IS ALSO NECESSARY
FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF OUR MOST
COMMON ACTIONS.

ST. PAUL, in whom our Lord speaks, makes it a duty for every Christian to "do all things for the glory of God," and thus to sanctify his most ordinary actions, even those which are purely natural, such as eating and drinking. That is to say, he demands a supernatural aim in all, so as to redeem our lowest and most earthly actions, to which our condition subjects us, by the holiness of our motives. But it is not possible to act in this way if God is not habitually the object of our intention, if He is not the absolute Master of our

heart and soul. Otherwise the things of the earth, acting so strongly on our senses and our imaginations and moving our passions so keenly, powerfully attract us to seek them for the pleasure belonging to their indulgence, and turn us from our true end. If they do not drag us into criminal excesses, at least they will defile us by an infinity of little faults ; they will often make us lose sight of God and of our true dignity, inducing us to run after the enchantment of mere nothings by occupying us too much with the necessities and ease of our bodies, and with all that encourages sensuality, vanity, and curiosity.

As long as we are not entirely given to God, we do not perceive this crowd of imperfections which, gliding into our daily life, cling like dust to the soul, tarnishing its purity and brightness. They become apparent, and their evil effect is truly estimated only by the help of that

divine light, communicated according to their need, to those souls of whom God has fully taken possession. God, reigning in us, will never suffer that even in little things we should act for an aim unworthy of Him and not to His glory ; each time we wander from it He will reproach us ; and, using the power of His grace, will inspire us to act more perfectly day by day. But God will only begin to establish His reign within us from the moment we give ourselves entirely to Him, to have no other love but His alone, no other interests but His, no other aim but that of pleasing Him. Until then we shall be blind about even the foundation of Christian perfection, as well as the immensity of detail it includes ; we shall only form false ideas of it which we are unwilling to correct ; we shall dislike it, not be willing to practise it, and, under the mean and dangerous pretext that it is not essential to salva-

tion, we shall deride those who practise and preach it, and even feel a secret aversion toward them.

XII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER IMPLIES THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFT OF OURSELVES TO GOD.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ taught with His own Mouth the prayer that each Christian should address to God, and it comprehends all the requests that should be offered. There are but few people who do not say it at least twice a day, morning and evening. But do they understand it? Do they offer it from the bottom of their hearts? Do they put into practice what it contains? They are very few who do so, because they must be entirely given to God to understand, enjoy, and practise this prayer.

Can we call God by the Name of *Our Father*, can we experience in our hearts

the feelings that that Name should raise within us, can we conduct ourselves as a child should toward such a Father, if we are not wholly devoted to Him? Let us weigh well all the qualities, all the claims belonging to this title of Father in connection with God; let us weigh well all the duties which respect, love, gratitude, dependence upon Him impose on us, as His creatures and as His children by adoption, and let us judge for ourselves if it is not the first and most indispensable of all our obligations to give Him our hearts irrevocably.

We pray Him first of all that *His Name may be hallowed*, that is to say, that all the glory due to this ineffable Name may be rendered to Him. And rendered by whom? By all intelligent creatures, and chiefly by ourselves. All our life ought to be nothing less than a continual hallowing of the Name of God, and a continual desire that it may be hallowed by

other men. Zeal for His glory ought to burn within us, ought to consume us unceasingly, when we see the many outrages dishonoring that Name. The gift of our heart is the only thing which can form for us such desires; and if so few Christians have them, it is because there are so very few who have sincerely given Him their hearts. What is the glory that God expects from us? That He may be loved by us in all things and beyond all things. "By love alone can we give honor to God," said St. Augustine. All His commandments are related to and contained in love. And what is love if not the gift of the heart, and the consequences of this gift?

Secondly, we pray that *His Kingdom may come*. What Kingdom, if not that of love? And where does God wish to establish it, if not in our hearts? This Kingdom reaches its perfection in heaven, but it must be begun on earth. And

how can it begin in each of us otherwise than by the gift of our hearts? God only reigns in us in proportion as He is the Master of our wills; and He can govern our affections only when they are focussed in one, which is love, and of which He is the object. His Kingdom is established only by the destruction of self-love, His chief enemy; and only by giving our hearts to God without reserve, can we effectually resolve the entire banishment of self-love, both by our own efforts seconded by grace, and by consenting that God Himself shall deal the last blows to His enemy.

Finally, we pray that the *Will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven*. Is not that to ask, though in other terms, that our hearts may be as perfectly His as the hearts of the Blessed? that we may offer no more resistance than they do to anything that is of His good pleasure? that we may bring the same zeal, the

same obedience, the same unselfishness to the execution of each indication of His Will? If we cannot feel all this when we make such a request, it is evident that we are not fulfilling the intention of Jesus Christ, and that we are not praying to our Heavenly Father as we ought to pray. We speak the words, but the heart does not dictate them; and how can they come forth from the heart if it is not fully given to God? These holy prayers become so many lies in our mouths as often as we refuse God what He expects from us for the hallowing of His Name, for the establishment of His Kingdom, and the fulfilment of His Will.

Let us seriously examine ourselves on this point, and until we have made an entire offering of ourselves to God, let us fear lest we offer the Lord's Prayer to our own condemnation.

XIII.

THE DESIGN OF GOD FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL IS FULFILLED ONLY IN THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES INTO HIS HANDS.

It is undoubtedly a principle of faith that God has destined each one of His elect to a certain degree of glory ; that consequently He calls each one to attain a certain measure of sanctity ; that He has prepared for each a certain succession of graces, which all tend and lead to the decisive grace of final perseverance ; finally, that in this design He has foreseen and arranged all the circumstances of the life of each one. But, in order to attain this degree of glory, to fulfil this measure of sanctity, not to break this chain of graces, never to wan-

der from this order of Providence, it is evidently necessary that we must give our hearts fully to God, in that critical moment when He is strongly urging us to yield them; for He only makes this request to accomplish His designs of mercy for us. If we refuse, His designs will not be executed and perhaps we may even be lost. By this refusal of the heart to God, I mean the unwillingness to give Him more than a share of it, or to give it under conditions and with certain reservations. These conditions and reservations are in reality a refusal to God; since He asks for them absolutely and entirely.

How many Christians of every condition, even the most holy, have incurred God's heavy displeasure for having refused Him this gift of their hearts! How many have had sad falls to reproach themselves with, from which it has been hard to rise, and leaving them still un-

able to feel an assured trust that God has pardoned them! How many have lived in imperfection, in lukewarmness, in trouble and anxiety of conscience, avoiding introspection, and never able to experience peace with God, because they have not yielded to Him all He desired of them! How tortured is a Christian soul filled with such uncertainty about his greatest and dearest interests!

XIV.

THE BEST USE OF OUR FREE-WILL IS TO
GIVE IT BACK AGAIN INTO THE HANDS
OF GOD.

WE all know that our perfection and our salvation both depend on a good use of the free-will given us by God. Again, we know that at any moment we may abuse this free-will ; that a little fault may lead on to a greater, and thus by degrees consummate our ruin. Our weakness is extreme, we cannot hide it from ourselves ; we are surrounded by temptations, and, from the inclination of our hearts, always prone to sin. God's grace, it is true, never fails us, whether to preserve from sin or to raise from falls ; but nothing is more common than failure to use the grace given, and it is precisely

that failure which constitutes our guilt. Our freedom is given that we may choose salvation, yet how many use it for their ruin!

Whence comes this misfortune, and what is its first cause? It is because the free-will has not been placed in the Hands of Him who alone can guide it safely and keep it from turning aside either to the right or left. As long as we desire to remain masters of it, as long as we claim the right of disposing of it ourselves, we are always in danger of using it wrongly, and, if this independence does not lead us in all cases to our eternal loss, at least it will never lead us to sanctity. But if, humbly acknowledging our blindness and weakness, we beg God to take charge of us; if we are fully decided to take no step of ourselves in any important point; if we consult Him to know His will, believing it will be declared to us, either by interior direction

or by the way of authority or counsel ; then we need fear no abuse of our liberty. We are no longer responsible, it is God who will answer for us ; and the care He takes of His own glory, as well as His tender love to us, will protect us from all dangers and infallibly lead us to a Blessed Eternity.

Persuaded, as we must be, of this truth, how can we hesitate one moment to trust God with the direction of our wills ? How do we dare to take a single step by ourselves, to form plans, to throw ourselves into enterprises, when we do not know but their consequences may affect our salvation ? These plans, we may plead, these proposals are not bad in themselves ; there is in them nothing that need disturb the conscience the least in the world. That may be, but how do we know but that this state of life, this connection, this journey, this change of residence, may not be for us an occa-

sion of sin, the beginning of a perversion of principles and habits. The precipice is not in sight during the first few steps of the road, yet perhaps it is but a little beyond ; God sees it and preserves us from it if no advancing step is made without consulting Him.

But what is this, some may answer ; has God endowed us with free-will, simply that we may deprive ourselves of it and reduce ourselves to continual servitude ? Have we no right to dispose of ourselves in anything ? God has given us liberty that we may employ it in His service, and consequently that through it we may do Him homage by always holding it submissive to His will. He has not made us free to emancipate us from dependence upon Him, but that this dependence may be voluntary and of free choice. He makes us recognize His rights over us, our need of His support, the advantages it will bring, the

risks we run if He is not continually holding us by the hand ; after that He leaves with us the decision. Can we deny that the best use of our liberty is to use it according to God's design for us and to consecrate it to Him, that He may govern it by His Providence and by His Grace ? Is that being reduced to slavery ? On the contrary, it is placing ourselves in the full liberty of the children of God. We do dispose of everything ourselves, but always in union with God's good pleasure, which we will have made our own in giving ourselves to Him. If this is a servitude it is one of love ; it is that of the Angels and Saints in Heaven and the source of their joy, and without these bonds of love there is no happiness either in this life or in the life to come.

XV.

THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD IS THE KEY TO GOSPEL TEACHING.

IT is of the greatest importance to each of us that we should thoroughly understand the teaching of the Gospel, for it is not only our rule of life, but also the standard by which we are to be judged by Jesus Christ, Our Lord, whose gift it is. This teaching has been given us in two ways : by our Lord's Doctrine and by His Example, its faithful and unerring interpretation. But we can never truly understand this Doctrine or this Example, still less make its study our delight and be always ready to follow in His Footsteps, if we do not, by an entire and earnest consecration, give ourselves to God.

The reason of this is very clear : all that our Lord Jesus Christ has done or taught is supernatural, it is all beyond the grasp of our natural intellect, and only so far as we are enlightened by grace can it be truly comprehended. Our perception is only in proportion as we submit it to God and He finds it docile to His inspirations. It will then be only imperfectly enlightened as long as we fail in our entire dependence on the Spirit of God. And that is why so few Christians, so few priests, so few religious attain a deep knowledge of true Christian morality. The Saints themselves did not understand it before they gave themselves to God. St. Augustine acknowledges as much in his confessions. To how many teachers, otherwise learned, might we not say, on the subject of the moral teaching of the Gospel, as Our Lord said to Nicodemus : " Art thou a Master in Israel and knowest not these

things." * An ignorant simple woman who serves God with all her heart might give us true lessons in these things.

Again, this teaching which passes our natural understanding is antagonistic to our natural inclinations: pride and self-love regard it with extreme aversion. Whoever studies it, however slightly, cannot disguise from himself that it is the hearts who cannot delight in it, who have invented the many spurious reasons for its evasion. But what is the only effectual means of overcoming this distaste and aversion? Nothing less than entire detachment from creatures and from self, that we may truly give ourselves to God. Until this step is taken the code of Christian morality is considered as a painful yoke to be submitted to as little as possible, as a heavy burden from which we only seek deliverance. But is there a single person, sincerely

* St. John, iii. 10.

devoted to God, who does not feel and proclaim that the yoke of Jesus Christ is easy and His burden light? It is love that makes it so, and with this love God fills the heart given to Him.

Finally, the practice of Christian morality is beyond our own strength. Even did we understand it perfectly, and were we most sincerely desirous to practise it, there is need of special grace to begin the work, courageously to bear its difficulties, to surmount its hindrances, and to persevere to the end in this war against self. To whom does God grant this grace? To those cowardly lukewarm souls who serve only from fear, or for their own gain; who, if we may say so, argue with Him that they may give Him as little as possible; who, in fact, love themselves more than God? No, this help is reserved for those open, true, generous souls, who unconditionally give themselves to God, earnestly desiring to

belong to Him and to Him alone. What will God refuse to him who has determined to give everything, to do everything, to suffer everything in order to please Him, utterly abandoning everything to His disposal to Whom he has transferred all rights over himself? To comprehend, to delight in, and to act upon the teaching of the Gospel, are fruits produced only by the gift of one's self to God.

Stop here a few moments, Christian reader, and reflect on what has been said. Have you thought seriously over the points that have been suggested? Do they appear true, just, important, necessary for your eternal welfare, and even for your present happiness? If it is so, thank God; but after hearing His voice, harden not your heart. Offer to God the heart He asks, and which so many reasons urge you to consecrate to Him.

XVI.

WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS GIFT TO GOD.

EVERY one can easily conceive that this gift must be one that God merits, one that He desires, or rather, since His commandment of love, one that is binding on all Christians, and one also that He requires of each person in particular. God explains Himself in His inspirations ; it is only necessary to be willing to listen to grace and to be determined to correspond with it faithfully. This choice must be made in all sincerity and with our whole heart. It must be entire, absolute, and irrevocable : entire, excepting nothing ; absolute, admitting no conditions ; irrevocable, embracing every

moment of our life to our last breath. These three words include all.

Then let us give ourselves to God to the full extent of all our powers, as He desires to give Himself to us throughout eternity ; entirely, forever, and with a love that passeth understanding. Is it too much that we, who owe all to God, who are true to ourselves only in loving God, and are happy only in possessing Him ; is it too much, we repeat, for us to be His in the short period of the present life when He has promised to be ours forever and ever ?

Let us give ourselves to God as the Lord Jesus, our Model, gave Himself to His Father. The devotion of our Lord was without limit, and so, in proportion, should ours be.

Jesus Christ had in Himself the fulness of grace, and He had also the fulness of self-consecration. Let ours answer to the measure of grace we re-

ceive. God wishes no more than this; but He also wishes no less; He desires His grace should have its full effect.

Let us also give ourselves to God as He has given Himself to us. Do we say with St. Paul: "He loved me and gave Himself for me"?* To what did He give Himself? To all that God's justice required to deliver us from Hell and open for us the gates of Heaven. Who can express or even conceive it? What does He expect in return from us? That we should love Him and give ourselves to Him. Not content with offering Himself once for us upon the Cross, He continues to offer Himself for us daily upon our Altars: He gives Himself, unites Himself, incorporates Himself with us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist each time that we approach the sacred table. Can we do less than offer Him all that

* Galatians, ii. 20.

we are, since He has offered to us all that He is : His Flesh, His Blood, His Soul, and His Divinity ?

XVII.

SOME ADVANTAGES OF THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF TO GOD.

WE are now to consider the advantages which result from this gift ; and speaking comprehensively we may say, they are truly so immense that they surpass all the human mind is capable of conceiving, and therefore we can express but a very small portion.

First, concerning the future life, it is certain that there will be an infinite difference between the happiness of those who have given themselves entirely to God and those who have done so only in part. For what God will reward in Heaven is less the good works accomplished than the disposition of the heart and its love for Him. It does not depend

on us to do great works for God, but it does depend on us to love Him with all our hearts. What happiness may there not be for that soul which, entirely given to God, has loved Him as much as He desires to be loved, with all the power of the grace given and all the capacity of the heart! If, after such full consecration, the Christian soul has been faithful to the end, even though struggling with the inevitable faults of human frailty, it matters little when or how death comes, it can have no fears for him. By this gift he has placed himself in that highway of pure love to God in which he must continue to advance as long as he is faithful to his promise. Without excluding the motive of self-interest, he does not habitually think of it, it is not his first object, he loses sight of it in the thought of God and the love of God. But the more he forgets himself the more God remembers him and acknowl-

edges his work as done for Himself only. God, Who is Love itself, recognizes undoubtedly His own Image in this love, and pours out with ineffable pleasure all His riches upon that soul whose one desire is perfect love for Him.

With regard to the present life, nothing can be more happy than the soul wholly given to God. It is an error as injurious to God as pernicious to true piety, to think otherwise. The experience and testimony of all the saints without exception demonstrate it. There has never been a single one who has regretted for a moment his devotion to God, or who has not desired to be more united to Him and to love Him more. Whom shall we believe if not these witnesses? And besides, if union with God is to be our happiness in Heaven, why should it not be so on earth? Is God less our Supreme Blessedness in this life than He will be in the other? The devil, seconded by self-love,

exaggerates the trials of the interior life with God to deter us from entering upon it, but let us be careful not to heed the suggestions he puts before our imagination, remembering that he is our enemy as well as God's. He desires our ruin ; but still more to prevent us from glorifying God by our devotion.

XVIII.

FIRST ADVANTAGE FOR THE PRESENT LIFE : ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

LET us count as the first advantage that this gift will procure for us here below the assurance of salvation as far as that is possible. It is true we may not have an absolute certainty because we can never be sure of our perseverance, but this gift does bring a feeling of confidence and repose which nothing can disturb. We may say within ourselves : "I am in God's Hands, and unless I withdraw myself from Him I cannot perish. Can any power pluck me out of His Almighty Hand? My salvation is no longer my own affair, it is God's ; my business is simply to love Him, and think only of pleasing and obeying Him.

God loves me, faith teaches me that ; I love Him, my conscience bears witness of that in a way I cannot doubt, and my God will help me to persevere in His holy love as long as I am faithful. Therefore, whatever may happen, while I preserve the love of God I shall be happy, and in that love find my Paradise."

Except in the time of interior trial, such is the habitual state of the soul given to God, with regard to the assurance of salvation. And even during these trials the soul, instead of fainting and trembling, on the contrary, grows stronger: so that those who, through the dark suggestions of the tempter even imagine that they must be lost, are yet, in the intervals of repose between these horrible temptations, more tranquil than others about their eternal welfare, and when delivered from them have no uneasiness for the future. God's desire in allowing these temptations is none other

than to purify the love of these souls, and bring them to a more perfect offering of themselves, more nearly approaching the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ when forsaken on the Cross by His Father. But when this offering has been made, they rise to a new life, in which they enjoy beforehand, in some measure, the bliss of Heaven.

XIX.

SECOND ADVANTAGE : FREEDOM FROM UNEASINESS OF CONSCIENCE.

THE second advantage of this gift is that it preserves and delivers us from all scruples, anxiety, worry of mind, and uneasy and unfruitful self-reflection. Whatever may be the cause of these torments of conscience, the principal one is that the soul which experiences them is not wholly given to God. Nothing is so easy, so free, so serene, so joyous as the conscience of one who belongs wholly to God. He moves with confidence, without looking with timid precaution for the road, since he does not direct himself ; God is leading and holds him by the hand. If a false step is made, God puts him right again ; if he falls, God raises

him ; and when a dangerous place must be passed, carries him in His Arms. One simple lifting of the heart toward the Well-Beloved, when a fault has been committed, brings back peace ; then a loving contrite look to see if his Heavenly Friend is offended, and that look is sufficient. How quickly the Dear Lord turns toward him, pardons him, pours out His bounteous graces, and seems to show His love even more than before, so that the soul is amazed at so much goodness and is forced to cry out : " Truly God is loving unto Israel, even unto such as are of a clean heart." *

* Ps. lxxiii. 1.

XX.

THIRD ADVANTAGE : INTIMACY WITH GOD.

FROM the moment the Christian has given himself to God, the awfulness of the Divine Majesty is no longer the prominent idea, but he sees more and more all that invites love and confidence. The terrors of religion, formerly so fearful that he hardly dared to dwell upon them, no longer create such an impression, while the truths of comfort, encouragement and strength so attract him that he is never weary of meditating upon them. God no longer appears as a master, a judge or an avenger, but as the best of fathers, the tenderest of spouses, the most intimate of friends. He can speak to Him with a holy familiarity, tell Him of his affairs, confide to Him all

troubles ; sometimes even, with holy boldness, he can gently expostulate with God, which far from offending the Divine Majesty is pleasing to Him : it would seem, in one word, that love had made the trusting soul God's equal. Experience alone can teach what may be the ease, content and liberty of this converse with God, heart to Heart.

XXI.

FOURTH ADVANTAGE : INTERIOR PEACE.

FOURTHLY, the truly devoted Christian enjoys a deep unalterable peace ; not only when in the beginning of the spiritual life God fills the soul with delight, but still more afterward, when God is proving and crucifying the soul. It is true that then this peace is less sensible ; but it is only the more deep and steadfast. He suffers, but is glad to suffer ; and, far from wishing relief, desires to suffer still more. This is exactly true : most Christians cannot believe it because they have no idea of the invincible force of Divine Love. As long as he is safe in the sure love of God he can there “lay him down in peace and take his rest ;” * for, “God will keep him in per-

* Ps. iv. 9.

fect peace whose mind is stayed on Him, because he trusteth in Him." *

What can trouble him there? Is it human events? He is raised far above earthly things when his heart is fixed on God. Is it his past sins? The first thing God did when he surrendered himself, was to forgive them all and to deliver him from any grievous doubt on that point. Is it his daily failures? They humiliate but do not trouble him. Is it his slow progress in virtue? He leaves all that to the judgment and estimation of God, content to be ever advancing without curiously examining how much or how far he moves onward. Is it the suggestions of the devil? They may indeed act on his imagination, but they do not reach the depths of his soul, which has become the abode of peace. Is it the fear that God may forsake him? He knows that the God of love is never the

* Is. xxvi. 3.

first to break His covenant. Is it the fear of not persevering to the end? His hope is in God's faithfulness, and he expects nothing from himself. Such is the state of happy security, wherein the faithful soul passes the earthly days, becoming more and more sure and unwavering as the last hour approaches.

XXII.

FIFTH ADVANTAGE : GOD'S SPECIAL PROTECTION AND GUIDANCE.

THERE is no doubt but that God extends a special protection over all His Elect : our Lord Jesus Christ assures us that not one of them shall perish. But it must be recognized that the souls which have wholly devoted themselves to God are necessarily under a still more special protection, including, not only the security of their salvation, but all that may contribute to their perfect sanctification. God does not leave them for an instant to their own guidance ; His eyes are always upon them watching over their steps ; He succours them in temptation ; He draws them away from all dangers ; He cares for them as the “apple of His

Eye ;" He tells us so Himself in Holy Scripture ; in fact, He arranges that all things turn to their spiritual advantage. He chooses Himself the guide who is to be the chief instrument in their perfection, and He inspires this guide with the same care, the same affection for these souls that He has for them Himself. If by the arrangement of His Providence and for their greater good they have no such director, He supplies the place and governs them more immediately Himself. Touched by so much attention and goodness from God, as well as from His Minister, and seeing that everything helps them onward, even that which seemed most adverse to their progress in holiness, they cry unceasingly with the Psalmist : "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want ; He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."*

* Ps. xxiii. 1, 2.

XXIII.

SIXTH ADVANTAGE : THE GIFT OF PRAYER.

THAT the gift of prayer is very rare among Christians is not astonishing ; it is reserved for those who have given themselves entirely to God. There are indeed some few to whom at the first God gives this favor, but it is to draw them on to give themselves to Him ; and if they refuse it is not long before He withdraws the gift. It may be considered as a law of the spiritual life, that every Christian, who is entirely devoted to God, is favored with the gift of prayer, whether he be conscious of it himself, or whether God for the greater good of his soul leaves him in ignorance of it, and that every Christian who is not truly given to God has either no gift of prayer

at all, or it is but for a short time, or what he thinks is the gift of prayer is an illusion. Therefore, the gift of one's self to God, with all its consequences, is the touchstone of true prayer.

This prayer is all love as much on God's side as with the soul ; it is so gentle, sweet and nourishing to the heart, that it is the constant desire of the Christian ; he leaves it with regret, and the necessary converse with men becomes painful and almost unbearable. What caresses, what favors God gives the soul ! He does not know how to contain himself or express his gratitude. If you doubt this read what St. Augustine felt immediately after his conversion. Read what has been written of the Saints or what they have related about themselves.

This prayer, which at first is like a gently penetrating dew, ordinarily becomes hard and painful in its progress ; but it is none the less peaceful and near

to God, and unites the soul to Him even more immediately. It is no longer a prayer demanding all the powers of the soul, but a prayer from its depths, which, expressing itself only in silence, is an image of the tranquil and ineffable enjoyment which God possesses in Himself. In truth, prayer draws us on day by day into God, until self is lost and the soul lives only in Him.

XXIV.

SEVENTH ADVANTAGE : ADMISSION TO THE WAY OF HOLINESS.

FINALLY, and as has before been remarked, this gift is the entrance into the way of true holiness ; that holiness which is more particularly the work of God, and in which the creature does but allow God to destroy and rebuild according to His good pleasure, aiding only by a very simple co-operation with Divine grace, neither preventing or resisting, but working only as he is moved by the Divine action. What can we do for our sanctification by our eagerness and all our efforts when grace is not the moving power? Nothing. "Except the Lord build the house, their labor is but lost that build it."* It is the same with our

* Ps. cxxvii. 1, 2.

struggle against sin. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." * All, that with the help of grace, God has placed it in our power to do, and which must be done to the best of our ability, and which God expects from us, is to say trustingly to Him: "My Lord, here I am, I have neither light nor strength; all my promises and resolutions are as nothing; I can neither make them nor keep them without Thee. Take Thou care of my soul, I leave it with Thee; sanctify it as it shall please Thee best. I only desire to work out my salvation under Thy orders and Thy direction."

Thus have the Saints spoken from the moment they began to desire true holiness; they gave up all hope of aid from self, and looked to God only for support. If some have at first been too much occupied with their own fervor, even to an

* Ps. cxxvii. 1, 2.

excess of pious devotion, they have soon learned to change their plan of action; learned that they must not be guided by imagination, natural temperament, impetuous and ill-advised zeal, but wait for the impulse of grace, follow it step by step, and be even careful not to press on beyond its guidance. They have recognized at last, by interior light and by experience, that their sanctification was indeed God's work more than their own, and that they advanced so much the more when they limited themselves to simply following **His** action.

XXV.

PRACTICE AND RECAPITULATION.

DEAR READER, perhaps you will say—
How must we then give ourselves to God? Does not this step depend more upon His grace than upon ourselves? Is not this gift an act of the most mature and ardent love, and is it in our power to perform such an act? The reply must come in God's Name; it is in your power if you sincerely desire to do it, because on God's part all is ready. He desires nothing so much as the possession of our hearts, if we, on our part, are only ready and willing to come to Him with confiding trust.

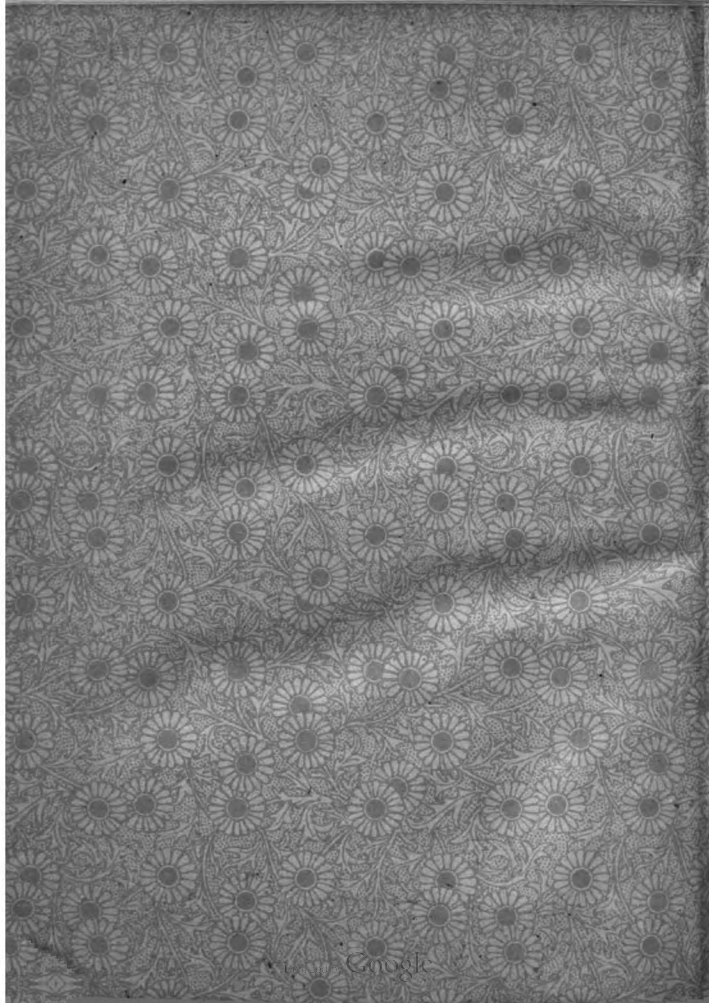
Perhaps, after reading this little book, God will inspire you with a burning desire to give yourself entirely to Him.

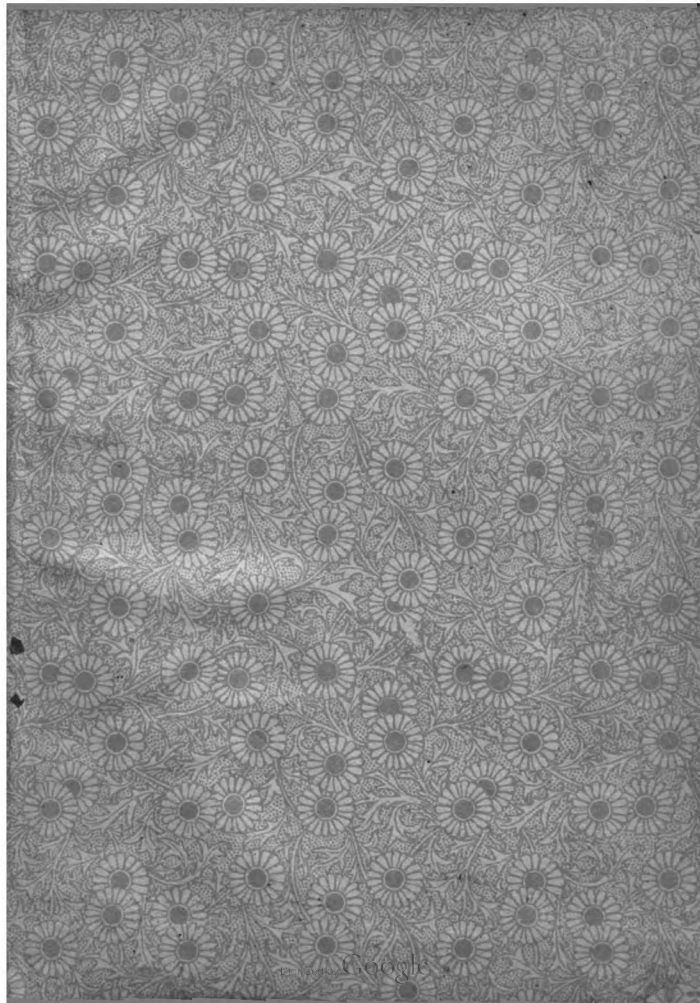
Nourish this desire by frequent acts during the day. "My God, Thou hast not given me this desire in vain, give me also grace to act upon it. When shall I give myself to Thee? How I long that Thou shouldst be the Master of my heart! How happy would the moment be in which I could say: 'God is mine and I am His!'" Carry this thought about with you everywhere. Let it be the chief object of your prayers. Offer your communions with this intention. A spark of love, if cherished, will soon produce a great fire. Above all, while you are soliciting this favor, be extremely faithful to grace, and do not allow yourself to commit any voluntary fault or neglect; and if this should befall you, turn at once to God in repentance. Perhaps God will take some time to prepare you; perhaps grace will take possession of your heart suddenly and soon; however it may be, if you persevere in the practices sug-

gested, sooner or later the much desired act will be accomplished. When it has taken place you will know it by the change in your soul. You will no longer be the same person.

The act is a simple one to the willing and obedient heart. Whoever is capable of raising imaginary difficulties has no serious, earnest desire to give himself to God and to God only.

THE END.





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